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Lucia A Keegan 08/04/2006 10:01:54 AM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

Cable
Text:

UNCLAS PARIS 05262

SIPDIS
cyparis:
ACTION: AGR
INFO: UNESCO SCI POL ECNO DCM AMB ECON TRDO

DISSEMINATION: AGRX
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AGR: MMEADOR
DRAFTED: AGR: MCHENARD
CLEARED: EMIN: OVANMAERSSEN SCI:VBELON

VZCZCFRI431
RR RUEHC RUEHRC RUCNMEM RUEHMRE RUEHSR RUEHGV
RHEHAAA
DE RUEHFR #5262 2151403
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 031403Z AUG 06
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0085
RUEHRC/USDA FAS WASHDC
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES
RUEHMRE/AMCONSUL MARSEILLE 1237
RUEHSR/AMCONSUL STRASBOURG 0159
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2464
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC

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SIPDIS

BRUSSELS PASS USEU FOR AGMINCOUNSELOR
STATE FOR OES; EUR/ERA AND EB (SPIRNAK);
STATE PASS USTR FOR MURPHY;
USDA/OS/JOHANNIS AND PENN/TERPSTRA;
USDA/FAS FOR OA/ROBERTS/SIMMONS/JONES;
ITP/SHEIKH/HENKE/MACKE/TOM POMEROY/MIKE WOOLSEY/GREG YOUNG; BOB
RIEMENSCHNEIDER
FAA/SEBRANEK/BLEGGI;
EU POSTS PASS TO AGRICULTURE AND ECON
GENEVA FOR USTR, ALSO AGRICULTURE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ETRD](#) [EUN](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: FRENCH AGRICULTURE MINISTRY FIRMLY CONDEMNS BIOTECH CROP
DESTRUCTIONS

REF: PARIS 5154

¶1. On July 30, anti-biotech activists struck again in southwestern France destroying a Pioneer biotech test plot and, for the first time, commercial fields of biotech corn. Although activists are continuing to express their anti-biotech stance in this manner (reftel), we have noted that a growing number of French corn producers are embracing the technology in 2006. The corn fields targeted by the group of "Voluntary Cutters" (Faucheurs Volontaires) belonged to farmers who had publicly affirmed their position in favor of biotechnology and acknowledged that they were themselves growing biotech corn this year.

¶2. While police on the scene did not stop the protesters from destroying the biotech corn fields, they subsequently arrested and detained five suspects and held them in custody for two days. These protesters are likely to be brought to trial in September. More protesters may be arrested, including the infamous activist Jose Bove, who recently received a two month jail term for a prior destruction.

¶3. Anti-biotech activists continue to be very vocal in support of

their position and receive wide coverage in the daily French press. Nevertheless, approximately two hundred French corn growers, representing both biotech and non-biotech interests, rallied at a demonstration of support on Tuesday for the farmers whose biotech fields were destroyed.

¶4. The French Ministry of Agriculture (MinAg) quickly issued a press communique on July 31st condemning the acts which destroyed biotech plots and commercial cultivation of crops which are produced legally in France. The MinAg stated that, to date, 40 percent of the biotech test plots authorized in 2006 have been destroyed. The latest MinAg communique is particularly noteworthy, since before this incident, they did not have a strong track record of condemning such behavior.

¶5. The press release said that Agriculture Minister Bussereau "strongly condemns these acts of vandalism contrary to rule of law and to the respect for private property." He affirmed his support to farmers and researchers who are "victims of illegal cutting." Finally, the communique stated that firm instructions have been given to local authorities to guarantee the security of biotech test plots and that legal proceedings will be launched systematically against those who destroy biotech crops.

¶6. Comment: Political tension on the issue of biotech cultivation continues to run high in France. A biotech bill is currently lingering in the legislative process, but further action will probably be viewed as politically unpalatable prior to the Presidential and parliamentary elections in 2007. In addition, France's regional Chambers of Agriculture will be holding elections in January 2007. The current majority at the regional Chambers is held by the farming association FNSEA, which is not opposed to biotech. Alternative organizations less favorable to biotech (such as the activist Confederation Paysanne) and with differing views on the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, could win a sizeable number of seats in the next election, should popular opinion in France's farming sector change. We will monitor this closely as the winter election approaches. End Comment.

Stapleton